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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 TAIPEI 002633

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SUBJECT: DIRECTOR,S MEETING WITH NSC SECRETARY GENERAL
DISCUSSES NEW PRC CIVILIAN AIR ROUTE

REF: TAIPEI 2627

Classified By: AIT Director Stephen M. Young,
Reason: Sec 1.4 (a/b/d)

Summary

1. (S/NF) American Institute in Taiwan (AIT) Director Stephen Young met with National Security Council Secretary General Mark Chen Tang-shan on 20 December 2007 to discuss the PRC's proposed civilian air corridor in the Taiwan Strait. Also present at the meeting was AIT Liaison Affairs Chief COL Tony Chow and NSC Deputy Secretary General Joanne Chang Chao-lin. Director Young requested Taiwan not politicize or publicize air route issue and to consult with the U.S. before making any possible response. SecGen Chen assured Director Young Taiwan has no plan for military response and will first consult with the U.S. if any such decision is being contemplated in the future. End Summary.

PRC Proposed Civil Air Route

2. (S/NF) Director Young informed SecGen Chen that he met with Minister of Defense Lee Tien-yu the previous day to discuss the PRC proposed air route near the Taiwan Strait Centerline and U.S. concerns of Taiwan and PRC over-politicizing this issue (Reftel). Director Young re-emphasized the same points with SecGen Chen that he delivered to Minister Lee, to include U.S. efforts with the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) and other partner nations, DAS Christensen's engagement with PRC officials last week, requests to Taiwan not to politicize this issue, and to consult with the U.S. prior to considering any military response.

3. (S/NF) SecGen Chen said the air route proposal was first brought to his attention by D/SecGen Chang when Hong Kong Civil Aviation Department (CAD) contacted the Taiwan Civil Aeronautics Administration (CAA). SecGen Chen said he wants to manage this issue smoothly and to do everything possible to prevent the establishment of this air route. He said cross-strait stability is a concern for the U.S. and Taiwan, that Taiwan wants to maintain the status quo, and Taiwan sees this air route as breaking the status quo. SecGen Chen commented the Centerline is a "pseudo-line" both sides of the

Strait need to respect. If neither side upholds this Centerline, then there could be potential conflict, something Taiwan does not want. Since the U.S. and Taiwan want stability in the Strait, we need to resolve this air route issue as soon as possible.

¶4. (S/NF) SecGen Chen noted the PRC had been scheduled to publicly announce this new route on 6 December 2007 but since such announcement has not been made, opined the PRC is re-thinking this proposal due to U.S. efforts. (Note: Later in the meeting, D/SecGen Chang said the 6 December 2007 date was a Taiwan prediction based on the standard ICAO practice of declaring 42 days ahead of implementation date, in this case 17 January 2007. However, D/SecGen Chang said the PRC's Civil Aviation Administration of China has added a notice of this route on its website on 5 December 2007. End Comment). SecGen Chen said he agrees with Director Young's concern about publicizing and politicizing this issue and informed Director Young that in an internal NSC meeting, it was decided that it is not good to publicize this issue.

¶5. (S/NF) At one point during the meeting, D/SecGen Chang said Taiwan has no representation in ICAO to speak against this proposal. Chang went on to say that other international organizations also make decisions affecting Taiwan without first consulting with Taiwan. Chang produced the 14 December 2007 International Health Regulations Authorized Ports List, published by the World Health Organization, to show how eight Taiwan ports were listed under China. (Note: This appeared to be Chang's way of laying out the case in justifying the necessity for Taiwan to be a member of international organizations such as the United Nations).

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¶6. (S/NF) Director Young refocused the conversation to the air route issue. He said this proposal may have been initiated by the PLA as a way to further pressure Taiwan but China may still be considering the pros and cons of moving ahead. Director Young asked SecGen Chen to convey to President Chen not to lock Beijing into any particular position by publicizing this issue and making it more difficult to resolve. There is danger that if both sides (in this case KMT and DPP) turn the air route into a political issue much like the UN referendum, Beijing may downplay the more critical security implications.

¶7. (S/NF) Director Young asked SecGen Chen about the NSC decision to make a military response based on an earlier comment by NSC Senior Advisor York Chen. SecGen Chen said this could be a misunderstanding. SecGen Chen emphasized that this is a sensitive time and any discussion of military action within Taiwan is not simple. He agreed that Taiwan should consult the U.S. first. He assured Director Young that if military actions were discussed, it did not come from the NSC or President Chen.

¶8. (S/NF) SecGen Chen said he understands the U.S. has presented the argument to the PRC and he hopes the PRC will respond positively. However, if China should decide to go forward with this new route, Taiwan will have to make necessary adjustments to its military training areas. In the meantime, SecGen Chen said he has discussed this subject with visiting Japanese officials and said Japan shares Taiwan's concerns.

¶9. (S/NF) At the conclusion of the meeting, Director Young informed SecGen Chen that he has asked Minister Lee to continue communications with AIT on this issue. The longer Beijing thinks about this, the higher the likelihood for positive results.

Comment

¶10. We are trying to temp down politicized discussion of this sensitive issue, but since President Chen raised it on

December 7 with visiting Congressman Faleomavaega, it has pretty much been open season in this highly charged election run-up. Clearly Taiwan is hopeful the U.S. and other friends can turn this off. If we cannot, it is likely to continue to attract commentary designed to support Green campaigning themes which focus on Beijing's nefarious intentions.

YOUNG